

# **EXHIBIT 63**

**MMA Fighting article titled  
“Leslie Smith launches  
Project Spearhead, a fighter-  
driven effort to get UFC  
athletes unionized”**

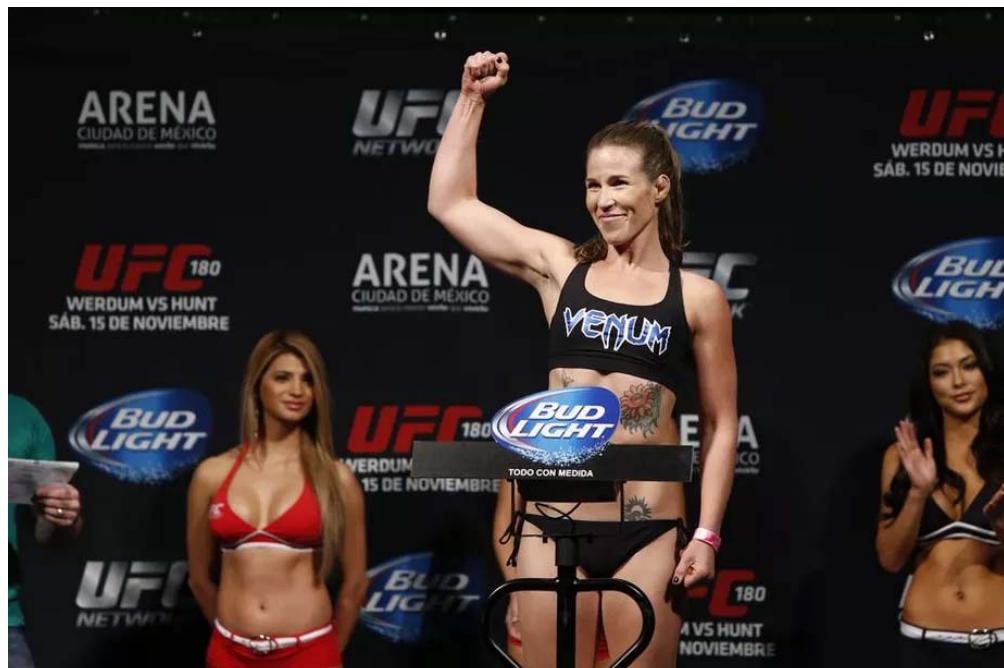
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# Leslie Smith launches Project Spearhead, a fighter-driven effort to get UFC athletes unionized

By [Marc Raimondi](#) | [@marc\\_raimondi](#) | Feb 13, 2018, 10:00am EST



Esther Lin, MMA Fighting

Leslie Smith created buzz last year when she asked Kobe Bryant about unions at the UFC Athlete Retreat. Long a part of fighter representation efforts, Smith has now gone off (mostly) on her own.

The UFC women's bantamweight fighter has started Project Spearhead, an effort to get UFC athletes to unionize, she confirmed with MMA Fighting on Monday. Unlike past labor movement failures, Smith vows that this attempt for organization will be driven mainly by fighters. She will start out as the interim president of Project Spearhead and Kajan Johnson, a UFC lightweight, is the interim vice president.

“This is kind of just another in a long string of efforts, but I think a lot of things separate it from the other ones,” Smith told MMA Fighting. “One of them being that this has no outside

influences. This is for the fighters, it was come up with by me — a fighter.”

The [website for Project Spearhead](#) launched Friday. On it is a step-by-step explanation of the unionization process and a link to download authorization cards, which would ignite said process if signed by enough athletes. The site says that the UFC is “misclassifying” fighters as independent contractors, when they are really treated like employees. As it is now, UFC fighters would not be able to be in a union, because they are independent contractors, per U.S. labor law.

“Project Spearhead is here to force the issue - the UFC can choose to either pay into our needs and respect us as employees with a say in all decisions affecting us or treat us like the independent contractors that we are being called and lighten up with the USADA supervision, uniforms and restrictions,” the site reads.

In 2016, unionization and the efforts to organize fighters were a hot topic, especially after the UFC sold to WME-IMG for more than \$4 billion. But the Professional Fighters Association (PFA), led by baseball super agent Jeff Borris, and the MMA Athletes Association (MMAAA), hurt by its affiliation with former Bellator promoter [Bjorn Rebney](#), have fizzled.

The MMA Fighters Association (MMAFA) has existed for nearly a decade, but its focus is on the Ali Act extension bill in Congress and an antitrust lawsuit against the UFC. The MMAFA does not want unionization, just a trade association without collective bargaining power.

[Randy Couture](#), [Jon Fitch](#) and [Cung Le](#) are among the fighters and retired fighters part of that group.

Smith was a part of the PFA, but left last year because she felt like Borris violated fighter confidentiality by passing on information to a board of MMA agents.

“I think that those efforts (PFA and MMAAA) failed, because they were not motivated by the right reasons,” Smith said.

Smith was also involved with the MMAFA, but said she was thrown out after she asked Bryant, the former NBA superstar, about unions at the UFC Athlete Retreat. A request for comment from MMAFA founder Rob Maysey was unreturned Monday night.

On the MMAFA, Smith said she no longer believes in what it is trying to accomplish with regards to the UFC, though she does support the Ali Act.

“That’s the goal of the MMAFA, to skewer the UFC and break it apart with this antitrust lawsuit,” Smith said. “And I am not down with that, either. I actually really like fighting for the UFC. I like fighting for the UFC and I want to continue to do so. I think that the UFC’s business model is what has managed to bring MMA to the mainstream and general public and I don’t want to just blow up the vehicle that got us to where we are right now. I want to make that vehicle a little more rider friendly. Give it a couple more front seats — I want some fighters in the front seat of the vehicle the UFC has been.”

Helping with Project Spearhead will be New York labor lawyer Lucas Middlebrook, who gained MMA fanfare three years ago when he vigorously defended Nick Diaz in his marijuana case in front of the Nevada Athletic Commission (NAC). Smith and Middlebrook were both part of the PFA and departed together.

Middlebrook is experienced with sports collective bargaining, as he is counsel for the NBA referees union and the Major League Soccer referees union. The “contact us” page on the Project Spearhead website points to Middlebrook’s White Plains, N.Y., office.

“He has educated me on all of this from Day One,” Smith said of Middlebrook. “So he has been invaluable to this whole effort. And when we actually have a fighters union, it’s gonna be Lucas Middlebrook that we’re all gonna have a lot of appreciation for.”

Smith, 35, said she has spoken to dozens of fighters over the last year plus-and has gotten a very positive response across the board. There is just reluctance, she said, because fighters fear retribution from the UFC.

“Everybody is into it,” Smith said. “Everybody likes the idea of it. Everybody wants to get more bargaining power from the UFC. The thing is everybody has their different issues that they’re going through, but it’s all the same issues. It all boils down to people not getting enough respect from the UFC and being stuck in these restrictive contracts and not being able to move past that. Everybody has their different arguments with the UFC, but they’re all the same at the end of the day.”

“I talk to people and they tell me that they are worried about their jobs. They say they want to get on board with this, but they’re worried about their jobs. I’ve been talking to some people who are really, really high up — like basically champions. And they’re still saying that they’re worried about their jobs.”

Why did Smith decide to go full bore into Project Spearhead now? It's because she only has one fight left on her UFC deal and isn't sure if she'll be re-signed despite being currently on a two-fight winning streak. Smith will face [Aspen Ladd](#) at UFC Atlantic City on April 21.

"There's no doubt that this is gonna happen," Smith said. "A union is going to happen. It's impossible for it not to happen at this point. It's just whether it's gonna happen right now and with this effort or if this is just gonna be another one and then there's gonna be another effort that comes up in the future. I'm not even against that. That's fine. Whatever ends up being, if it works out that's great. But this is my last chance to make a full-on effort when I can."

Smith is happy to be at the forefront of this effort, but wants to make clear that it's not her union; it's for all fighters. There will be democratic processes, she said. Among the things listed on the website that Project Spearhead wants to address are full healthcare; monthly sponsorship stipends; separation of title fights and superfights; and space on in-cage gear for fighter sponsors.

And Smith also wants to get across that fighters who sign cards will be anonymous. The UFC won't find out who has signed an authorization card and the names of those involved in the effort will remain confidential. Smith said "there's no risk" to joining up.

"The main thing that I've gotten from everybody is everybody wants it to happen and they all want to be a part of it," she said. "But they don't want to lead the charge. ... We don't need a face for it. We need a backbone for the union. I feel like people definitely want it, but they don't want to put themselves out on a limb for it. Well, that's fine. The way that this is structured, they don't have to put themselves out for it. All they have to do is sign a card, send it in."

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